

Final Minutes

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament

Committee Meeting

October 28, 2003

Members Present

Claude Bain
B. W. Beauchamp
David Elliott
Bill Hall
Jon Lucy
Ken Neill, III
Hank Norton
Charles Randolph
Christine Snook
John Thurston
Ruchard Welton

Members Absent

Nancy Cobb
Charles Lovell

Public Attendees

Connie Barbour
Mark Wray
Carolyn Brown
Debbie K. Hurst
Bill Hurst
Reese Bowles
Rick Williams
Craig R. Paige
Cheryl Paige
Mickey Walsh
Bill Walsh
Mark Snook
Craig Miles
Keith Bangel
Francois Betouland
Justin Bangel
Scott Cole
Robert Holtz
Zach Marston
Andy Poulter
Lance Poulter
Jim Fritts
Jim Hayden

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Tournament Director Claude Bain. Mr. Bain welcomed the public and explained the procedure to be followed for the evening. Public comment would be taken at the start of the meeting on any topic relevant to the Tournament or meeting agenda; however, since this was a working meeting and not a public hearing, public comment would not be taken once the Committee began actively considering the agenda. Mr. Bain briefly reviewed the agenda and opened the floor to public comment.

Mark Wray representing himself and VA Beach Anglers Club presented the Committee with a petition gathered at Long Bay Pointe Tackle containing over 250 signatures opposing changing Citation standards from weight (pounds) to length (inches). VBAC was opposed to the change. He stated the VSWFT had an investment in the scales which should be protected and utilized. Mr. Wray also favored recognizing the largest fish in

each species during the year with a special annual award and stated that having only three controversies relating to the winners in 2 years was not significant. Mr. Wray also favored a public awards ceremony. Finally, he stated the VSWFT should not be in the business of promoting or catering to tourists and tourism, the program should look out for the recreational fishermen who buy licenses that support the program.

Carolyn Brown stated the IGFA was the international arbiter of fishing awards and they use a weight standard and VSWFT should continue to use weight as the standard for Citations. Mrs. Brown favored a reinstatement of annual awards for the top fish in each species.

Debbie Hurst, representing Great Bridge Fisherman's Association as its secretary, stated that organization voted unanimously to continue the current combined system, with weight standards for kill Citations and length standards for releases. Program is working well now. Mrs. Hurst also favored a reinstatement of the annual species awards and an awards ceremony.

Reese Bowles spoke recounting the opinions expressed on his radio show and among members of the school fishing club with which he is associated. Radio response was overwhelmingly in favor of keeping a weight standard for Citations with a length standard for releases. The kids in his fishing club also preferred weight. Mr. Bowles also stated there was plenty of money in the recreational license fund and the VSWFT deserved more money to get more help with the program.

Rick Williams appeared as vice president of Portsmouth Anglers Club and stated he found out about this meeting too late to get a vote of the club. However, in polling members by phone they support weight standard and reinstatement of annual species awards. On the conservation side a release for flounder was needed. Finally, Mr. Williams suggested more time and notice of future meetings.

Scott Cole talked about the excitement generated around a scale when a fish is weighed and he felt this would be missing with a length standard using a measuring board. Mr. Cole supported annual species awards and suggested using volunteers to help maintain scales.

Robert Holtz stated most of what he wanted to say had been covered and he supported prior speakers. Mr. Holtz felt the VSWFT had become too focused on conservation goals in recent years and was not pursuing its main responsibility to recognize true trophy-size fish. He suggested a trigger – for example if there were more than 500 Citations in a species in a year, the Citation standard would automatically increase the following year. Too many Citations takes away from recognizing truly outstanding catches.

Lance Poulter supported VSWFT remaining the same – weights Citation for captures and length Citations for releases.

Andy Poulter supported VSWFT remaining the same. Mr. Poulter likes the traditional program but also supported conservation goals being promoted by the program. He stated the release Citation availability influences anglers to release fish. Mr. Poulter favored reinstatement of annual species awards.

Cheryl Paige favored reinstating annual species awards stating it took a large measure of luck and disagreed with assessments that it creates too much competition.

The scale maintenance problem was brought up and Mr. Bain explained the problems with state and local certification agencies and the history of the release awards was explained, including the conservation aspects and how they influenced VSWFT awards.

Keith Bangel stated that a length only standard would promote conservation in doing away with the kill Citations and incentive to kill fish.

Mr. Bain clarified the inch standard would not make the program release only; killed fish could still be brought to a weigh station, but they would be measured, not weighed. Zach Marston stated he wanted to see the VSWFT remain the way it current operates, and he also discussed his problem with the current release program which requires a witness.

Scott Cole suggested releases with a photograph or video accompanying application.

Bill Walsh stated he felt the reason anglers talked about the length of fish was that was the only reliable standard on the water; scales are not accurate on a boat in a sea. He felt weight was the needed standard for the program.

This ended the public comment.

Claude Bain then reviewed the current fishing year and the trends in current year Citations, especially in reference to the prior year and recent trends. Highlights included the probability that 2003 will produce second highest number of Citations ever, with an outside possibility of setting a record. Without the disruption of Hurricane Isabelle a record year would have been likely, even though Citations for offshore fish (billfish, tunas, dolphin) are well below what might be expected during a mediocre year. Probably the poorest season in 30 years. Species with large Citation increases included red and black drum, flounder, and spadefish. The special situations which affected gray trout, cobia, and black sea bass were mentioned. Chris Snook stated the black drum fishery excelled during a season which spanned 8 weeks this year, twice the norm, probably due to cool water temperatures in May and June.

Mr. Bain then suggested a move to the current agenda, and brought up the proposal to change the Citation standard from weight (pounds) to length (inches). Dave Elliott stated he did not feel this merited much discussion since input from the angling public (both tonight and prior to the meeting in contact with the angling public by Committee members) indicated a substantial opposition to the proposal. Several members agreed. Chris Snook stated she felt the same way but much of the public was interested in

expanding the release program and we should include release Citations on all species as part of this proposal. Richard Welton stated this was a separate issue and should be brought up after the vote on length versus weight standards. John Thurston stated his concern about state records and Mr. Bain stated they would remain in pounds and ounces under the length proposal. Discussion then focused on the how the proposal ever originated, and Claude Bain explained how and why he brought it to the board 4 or 5 years ago, and explained how the Committee process works. Wally Beauchamp stated any thought that this proposal was a “done deal” by the public was totally incorrect. When considering major changes the Committee often tables ideas in order to seek public input – to see what the angling public wants – before making a decision and that was what was done in this case.

Dave Elliott moved the VSWFT not adopt a length standard for kill Citations and remain with a weight standard in pounds and ounces. This was seconded by John Thurston and passed unanimously.

Chris Snook stated she wanted to take up the issue of a release Citation for all species since not everyone eats fish or wants to take fish home, and this trend is growing. Charles Randolph agreed stating fishing was more about numbers when he and his friends were younger, but now they more often than not prefer to release the fish they catch.

Ken Neill supported the idea of a length or release Citation on all species but also stated there should be a weight or kill Citation on all species it is legal to retain. For many anglers trophy size measured in weight is a big consideration, and if it is legal to kill and keep the fish he felt there should be a weight Citation available. Chris Snook agreed with Mr. Neill.

Bill Hall stated he was not sure the Committee was prepared to establish trophy lengths for everything at this time. D. Elliott stated he wanted to make sure the lengths were appropriate for real, trophy-size fish. Jon Lucy felt the appropriate levels were often moving targets which have been moving upward in recent years and the impact of fisheries management has exacerbated this trend.

Richard Welton agreed that a release Citation should be established for all species; the lengths to use was a second issue which we might or might not be able to handle at the current meeting. Mr. Welton stated he did not agree there should be a kill Citation on all fish legal to catch, citing as an example the bad publicity the VSWFT would receive if we rewarded the killing of any billfish. He felt Citation sizes (weight and length) should reflect true trophy fish, that the goals associated with tourism and conservation, which impacted decisions to keep Citation requirements lower, were no longer primary considerations, and he had been guilty of pursuing too many conservation goals for the VSWFT.

Mr. Bain stated he did not feel the tourism and conservation goals could or should be divorced from the program; they had been a part of the program since its inception in

1958. The program needs goals apart from just rewarding anglers to help justify its state purpose.

Jon Lucy agreed a conservation goal was appropriate but the quality of the program had been watered down. The VSWFT needed to “raise the bar” on its standards given the trends of recent years. Mr. Neill agreed but still wanted a kill Citation for all legal fish.

Bill Hall made a motion to establish a release Citation for all fish; Jon Lucy seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

The Committee then took up the issue of establishing lengths for all releases. Bill Hall suggested a subcommittee could be formed if Committee was not prepared for the issue tonight. Richard Welton stated the weight Citations had to be dealt with first, since they are the “standard” being used to judge Citations and then the lengths could be set correspondingly. Ken Neill felt both standards could be dealt with at tonight’s meeting and several members agreed it would be worthwhile to start.

Mr. Bain suggested the Committee could proceed species by species using the information provided to the Committee in their packages on the length proposal (which based the lengths on current Citation standards) and the information on recent Citation trends by weight and length.

Mr. Welton stated the VSWFT was giving out far too many Citation awards; he felt if more than 100 awards were given in a species in a year, then it was too many. Mr. Hall and Mr. Beauchamp agreed that too many were being awarded in many species but did not feel any arbitrary limit of 100 was in the program’s best interests. C. Randolph stated population trends in fisheries would take care of some of the problems with too many awards and standards should not be adjusted too much or too quickly. Mr. Neill stated the Committee had to be very careful in adding lengths; if they were not set properly, then overall Citation numbers would go much higher. R. Welton stated he was a major cause for low length standards in many species in the past due to his desire to push conservation goals and the Committee had to be more cognizant of true trophy-size in setting length standards.

Mr. Bain then reviewed two issues the Committee might have to face in this discussion:

- 1) much of the information available to the Committee in setting standards comes from the anglers themselves on Citation applications. Release Citations require a measured length sworn to by the angler and a witness on the Citation application. The decision to raise a length standard for a release might come largely from the Citation applications and the lengths listed might not be measured properly (probably not in some species), might be influenced by anglers’ desires to exaggerate their catches, or were estimated or just “pulled out of the hat” in a few cases. Mr. Bain cited an internet thread referring to release Citations as “Liar’s Citations”. He stated the Citation program is based in large part of the integrity of the angling public (in fact it could not operate without it) and the Committee should be prepared to set standards based on this information. To the extent the angling public has not put good

measurements on Citation applications when required to do so and swear to the accuracy, then the honest anglers will be adversely affected by rising standards – but this is the best and only information available and it must form the basis for the Committee's decisions.

- 2) Many anglers who actually do measure fish do not follow a set standard for measuring fish. An internet thread on Tidal Fish discussed the lack of a standard in Tournament rules and participants seemed to come to the conclusion that any way you want to measure a fish that can make it a Citation should be accepted since no standard was prescribed. The use of total length was contemplated for the VSWFT since that is the legal standard for VA fishery regulations, but Mr. Bain stated it might be easier to allow anglers to measure anyway they wanted - the minimum length standards can be adjusted upward to cover anglers measuring along the contours of the body with a tape, squeezing a tail together, or other actions to increase the measured length of fish.

Mr. Neill then stated that total length was not even defined for legal purposes for enforcing fishery regulations except for flounder and black sea bass. He felt a standard should be included in Tournament rules. Mr. Hall and several other members agreed.

Mr. Neill moved the length standard for the VSWFT for Citation purposes only should be total length measured on a flat measuring surface. Bill Hall seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The Committee then proceeded to consider both the weight and length standard of each eligible species. Mr. Bain asked the Committee if they wanted to have a formal motion and vote on each suggested change or do it by consensus, and it was decided to do it by consensus unless there appeared to be diverging views requiring a formal vote. As each species was introduced to the Committee for consideration, Mr. Bain reviewed recent Citation and population trends, and factors which may have affected the populations.

Bluefin Tuna

Current Citation standards are 100 pound minimum and 60 inch release; John Thurston stated both were trophy levels and should remain the same; Consensus agreement

Yellowfin Tuna

Mr. Hall suggested 75 pounds; needed to get closer representation of true trophy; Mr. Neill stated the big influx of Citations two years ago was a "one-year wonder". Mr. Bain reviewed the poor offshore season this year, reiterated the feeling that the biggest variable year-to-year in offshore species is warm currents, presence of Gulfstream eddies, wind patterns, presence of bait, and stated yellowfin populations peaked several years ago and are currently in a decline. Consensus reached to leave yellowfin Citation at 70 pounds; action on a release Citation length was deferred for a couple of weeks to gather some length-weight information.

Cobia

Mr. Welton suggested a 60 pound fish was more representative of a true trophy size, and Mrs. Snook stated she could vote for that level. Mr. Neill did not see any reason to increase weight above 50 pounds, but felt release size should go to 50 inches, stating a 44 inch fish could weigh below 30 pounds. Mr. Randolph and several committee members suggested a 55 pound minimum and a 50 inch release would be appropriate given recent population trends and a management regimen which is likely to prolong the population surge and keep the adult population large and possibly growing. A vote was taken and unanimous agreement to have 55 pound minimum with a 50 inch release.

Striped Bass

Mr. Neill began by stating the 40 pound minimum size was good, but the release standard should be increased to 44 inches. Several committee members mentioned 45 pounds and 46 inches as possible standards. Mr. Welton stated 40 pounds was probably a good standard given the huge amount of effort by the angling public to catch striped bass; the fact that there are a fairly large number of Citations is well correlated with a species which receives the highest amount of angler effort of any species. Mr. Neill stated 44 inch release standard would still serve a conservation goal, since very few 44 inch fish would attain 40 pounds, thus providing an incentive to release large breeding females. Consensus reached to have 40 pound minimum with a 44 inch release. Mr. Welton then asked Craig Paige, a charterboat operator who does a lot of striped bass fishing, if he felt this was a good trophy representation, and Mr. Paige said the decision was right on target.

Wahoo

Mr. Bain stated this was one of the first species to be considered where the Citation level was well under maximum size and might be construed as not a trophy, even though very few fish are registered for Citations – probably due to geography and preferred fish range. Mr. Welton and Mr. Hall suggested the Citation minimum be moved closer to trophy size. The release discussion centered upon the difficulty in measuring a wahoo for a release and the practicality of providing a release for a fish that is most likely going to be gaffed to be landed. Both Mr. Hall and Mr. Neill stated there would not be many releases due to problems associated with the effort and food value. Mr. Welton stated this was not a good candidate for a release. In the end a 35 pound minimum and a 50 inch release (estimated length) was agreed upon by consensus.

Dolphin

Mr. Hall, Mr. Beauchamp, and Mr. Welton stated a 20 pound dolphin was not a good standard for a trophy dolphin, even if the Citation numbers have varied dramatically in past years. Discussion on the difficulty of measuring and releasing a dolphin dominated discussions, but Mr. Neill pointed out that there is a dolphin tagging effort in the southeast so measuring and releasing dolphin is possible if somewhat difficult. Mr. Welton suggested a 25 pound minimum for dolphin Citations with a 46 inch release, stating the length standard is a little bit unsure but we should set the standard and let fishermen tell us if the bar was set too high or too low. Consensus agreement for Mr. Welton's suggested standards.

King Mackerel

Mr. Welton stated a 20 pound king mackerel may not be a trophy in other areas, but it has been proven to be a real trophy here for many years. Unanimous consensus to keep 20 pound minimum and establish a 44 inch release.

Bluefish

Mr. Thurston and Mr. Hall stated the bluefish standards are good and to leave them where they are. Consensus to keep 16 pound minimum and 36 inch release.

Gray Trout

Mr. Bain stated that last year this Committee felt this fishery was on the cusp of taking off and Mr. Welton had warned the group that the Citation minimum would have to go up. Inexplicably, the overall fishery was down along entire East Coast, even though Citations totals went up due to big fish in Rudee Inlet for an extended period of time. Mr. Bain asked Carolyn Brown and Rob Holtz for their assessment of fishery this year. Committee felt not appropriate to institute changes after poor year along entire coast, so by consensus gray trout remained 9 pound minimum with a 30 inch release.

Spadefish

Mr. Hall stated this was a real tough fish to get a handle on and the weight could vary as much as 2 pounds or more based upon the thickness of the fish. Mr. Welton stated 9 pounds was proving not to be a trophy spadefish. Mr. Hall agreed saying many people only registered one spadefish for a Citation (largest), despite catching many over the 9 pound minimum, particularly for a couple of spots up the Bay. Discussion continued upon sizes in different areas, lack of large amount of reliable data, and possibility of one or two good year classes causing an increase in large fish in last two years. Mr. Welton asked Mr. Paige for his thoughts and he stated 9 pounds was right size. A vote was taken to keep the minimum size at 9 pounds and passed 8-2.

Mr. Hall reiterated his feeling that these fish vary in weigh substantially based upon thickness and this makes setting a release length difficult. He said a 21 inch fish can be as small as 7 pounds or as large as 9 pounds. Mr. Neill stated most 9 pound fish must be 22 inches. Mr. Bain asked Mr. Paige for his expertise and he stated a 21 inch fish would be at least 8 pounds. Mr. Welton stated the current release size of 21 inches was too small, as evidenced by the prior discussion and huge number of releases registered. Mrs. Snook stated she was really not sure about the proper length because of the high variability in weight based on thickness. Mr. Bain stated this species might be subject to some degree of measurement variability (aggressive measurements) due the shape of the tail. Consensus reached to increase release length to 22 inches.

Tautog

Mr. Neill stated he does a lot of tautog fishing and has tagged lots of tautog and he has seen only one fish of 22 inches that weighed 9 pounds. Generally Committee felt 9 pounds was appropriate size for Citation. Mr. Welton asked Carolyn Brown for a comment on release size, and she stated 21 inches was not large enough, should be 22

inches or possibly 23 inches. Committee voted 8 – 1 with 1 abstention to keep Citation at 9 pounds and increase release minimum to 23 inches.

Flounder

Mrs. Snook stated she would hate to see the flounder Citation go up from 7 pounds too quickly – on too little evidence of need. Mr. Randolph agreed. Mr. Hall stated he was not sure the large number of Citations was inappropriate given the huge numbers of people targeting flounder and the large number of trips taken. Mr. Welton stated there were too many Citations being issued currently at 7 pounds, but 8 pounds might be unduly restrictive if there were even a slight decrease in adult fish. Mr. Bain stated this might be a classic case where management of fish is creating a layer of influence on the Citation program. Previously, the Committee need only worry about year-class strength and fishing pressure, but now management is providing large measurements of protections to fish of certain sizes or groupings in the population, more fish (even in mediocre year classes) are reaching adult and trophy size, and past Citation trends cannot provide good guidance on this problem since management was not a factor in prior population upswings. Consensus reached to leave flounder Citation at 7 pounds. Mr. Neill, Mr. Hall, and Mrs. Snook stated a 26 inch release was appropriate with a 7 pound minimum size. Mr. Welton predicted there would not be 30 release Citations in a year due to the food value of the flounder. Consensus reached for a 26 inch release standard.

Sheepshead

Mr. Bain stated the growing number of sheepshead Citations is coming out of a small group of people – very small amount of effort. Mrs. Snook stated there were some caught by black drum fishermen, but they were generally very large fish. Mr. Neill stated we generally have very big fish here. Mr. Bain reviewed the identification problem with black drum, which necessitated a memorandum to weigh stations this year, and stated a few of the Citations in 2003 were likely to be small black drum. Mr. Randolph stated there was a big jump in Citations this year and need an increase in minimum size. The Committee continued discussion on size without a consensus. Vote was taken to increase minimum size to 7 pounds, and it passed 6-3 with 1 abstention. The release minimum was set at 21 inches by a vote of 6-4.

Black Sea Bass

Mr. Hall stated a 5 pound sea bass was very large and despite the increase in Citations caused by the developing winter fishery, the Citation size should not be changed. Mr. Welton questioned whether a 5 pound fish would be a trophy as the winter fishery developed and management caused a turnaround in the population. Mr. Randolph stated 5 pounds was a trophy size. Consensus reached to leave black sea bass minimum at 5 pounds. Release survivability (and whether this fish was a good candidate for a release award) became an issue as the expanding winter fishery is coming from deep water 25 – 30 fathoms. Mr. Lucy stated the survivability has been demonstrated to be good at waters up to 80 feet but over 100 feet the survivability becomes a problem. Mr. Bain pointed out that approximately 40% of the awards in 2003 came from waters under 100 feet, and while the expanding fishery is moving to deeper waters, there are still plenty of fish caught over shallower coastal waters. Mr. Bain stated this might be a case where

conservation truly is not an issue with release due to survivability issue. Mr. Welton stated these fish are pursued mainly by anglers looking to take fish home to eat and not likely to see many release Citations if the length is set to closely correspond to Citation weight. Measuring variability due to the tail filament was discussed. Consensus reached to establish a 22 inch release Citation.

Spanish Mackerel

Mr. Thurston stated a 5 pound fish is a real trophy. Mr. Bain stated he had some personal experience with larger fish and a 26 inch Spanish mackerel was a close match with 5 pounds. Mr. Hall agreed. Consensus to keep Citation at 5 pounds and establish a 26 inch release.

Speckled Trout

Committee generally happy with current Citation levels. Mr. Hall added a 24 inch release was right on the money especially with spring fish. Consensus reached to leave speckled trout Citation at 5 pounds with 24 inch release.

Gray Triggerfish

Almost no discussion occurred to reach consensus of keeping a 4 pound minimum and adding a 20 inch release.

Croaker

Mr. Hall stated these fish have been abundant in recent years and Citation totals have not been too high so a 3 pound minimum seemed to be the right level. Discussion centered around a 19 inch release as approximating 3 pound fish, although there is a fair amount of variability in weight based upon girth. Mr. Bain stated the problem with developing releases for panfish, especially croaker and spot, is the huge numbers of fish caught when they are abundant and the consequences of being wrong in the development of a minimum length. Setting the release size too low could result in thousands of awards in a single year, and the Committee might be prudent to set the initial standard high, knowing it could be adjusted in future years based on results and angler input. Mr. Beauchamp stated the number of fish entered with a 19 inch minimum could be amazing. Mr. Welton suggested a 20 inch minimum size for a release, recognizing there would probably be some number of people complaining about the size. Mr. Hall stated this would make some people mad, but Mr. Welton stated they really would have no grounds to complain; since there was no release prior to this decision, the Committee was not changing an existing standard - the Committee is just trying to set a good standard for the fishery by being conservative in its initial application. Mr. Norton stated there would certainly not be a "flood" of releases with a 20 inch minimum. Consensus reached to keep Citation at 3 pounds and add a release minimum of 20 inches.

Kingfish (Roundhead)

Mr. Hall stated the current minimum weight was working and the 16 inch minimum in the length proposal was good. Consensus reached to keep 1.5 pound minimum for Citation and add a release at 16 inches.

Pompano

The 1.5 pound weight Citation was viewed as appropriate but information was sketchy on an appropriate length for a release. Consensus reached to keep current weight and defer the adoption of a length standard until information can be gathered.

Spot

Mr. Welton stated a 1 pound spot was proving not to be a true trophy given the numbers registered in recent years, and suggested 1 lb., 2 oz. Mr. Hall mentioned the problem involved in keeping scales in calibration for 1 ounce increments, scales that do not have small enough increments to weigh a spot, and generally the practical problems in moving away from a 1 pound or half pound increments for weighing fish. Mr. Beauchamp agreed that 1 pound might not be a trophy size, but scale limitations might not allow a weight change. Mr. Welton asked Craig Paige for an assessment of length for 1 pound fish, and Mr. Paige stated most 12 inch fish would weigh 1 pound and the two 13 inch fish he has seen weighed 1 lb., 6 oz. and 1 lb., 8 oz. Mr. Welton suggested a minimum weight of 1 lb., 2 oz. and 12.5 inches for a release, which he felt would ensure entries would be at least 1 pound even if there were slight scale problems and at least 12 inches if there were issues related to the way the fish were measured. Mrs. Snook stated she did not think adding weight increments in ounces would be a problem based upon her weigh station operation. Mr. Neill stated he did not like adding 1 or 2 ounces to the Citation minimum; he liked "round" numbers. Mr. Hall stated the sheer numbers of Citation may force a weight increase in the future but should not be now; many years with fewer than 10 Citations and could return to those levels. Mr. Randolph suggested keeping it at 1 pound for next year, and Mr. Welton agreed it was probably good since so many changes were being made. Consensus reached to keep spot Citation at 1 pound.

Mr. Hall suggested a 12.5 inch minimum for a release Citation. Mr. Neill suggested 13 inches, since he felt there really was no need for a release since spot were generally sought for food. Mr. Thurston agreed stating there probably was no real reason for a release. Mr. Bain stated the group has voted for a release on everything and reminded them of his concerns relating to potential inundation of applications if the minimum for a Citation release were set too low for a panfish like spot. Mr. Randolph recommended 13 inches and a vote was taken and passed 7 –2, with 1 abstention for a 13 inch release standard. Mr. Bain stated this would probably bring some objections and comments from anglers, but was a prudent decision.

Billfish

Mr. Neill stated he felt there should be a weight Citation for a kill since it was legal to land billfish. Mr. Neill would set the standards very high to severely limit the potential for many kills, suggesting 1000 for a blue marlin. The Committee was not generally receptive to this idea. Mr. Bain pointed out that there is a quota on recreationally caught white marlin and this could result in a kill Citation which would not be applicable for an entire season; in addition, this would not be good publicity for a program that was the coastal leader in providing for billfish conservation. A short discussion about minimum lengths for releases ensued with Mr. Neill pointing out how tournaments provide for measuring minimum lengths, although it can be a difficult exercise. Consensus reached

for no addition of weight Citation (with Mr. Neill opposed) and no minimum length required for releases.

Sharks

Mr. Neill suggested putting a weight Citation on sharks. Mr. Hall stated that might be appropriate for makos, which are often sought for food. Mr. Welton stated Committee might consider a weight Citation applicable to makos only, and while keeping other species release only. Mr. Hall then stated most mako fishermen shoot them before putting them in the boat which brings rules violations to the forefront. Mr. Bain stated he has not received any suggestions from the public to change the shark Citation from release only and stated he did not see any reason to revisit an issue that was not broken. Vote was taken to keep a 6 foot minimum for a release and not to add a weight Citation, which passed 9 –1.

Amberjack

Mr. Neill renewed his request to add a weight Citation, suggesting 70 pounds, stating they were good to eat. Mr. Thurston stated a 60 pound minimum might be more appropriate, if it was decided to add weight Citation back into program. Mr. Welton stated he was opposed to a weight citation, reasoning the fish were so concentrated around structures there should not be any encouragement to kill these easily vulnerable targets. In addition, he stated his experience with worms in the flesh turned him off to the fish as food. Mr. Hall and Mr. Neill pointed out very few were killed in the last couple of years a weight Citation was available. Mr. Bain stated there had been no public comment suggesting a need for a weight Citation and reviewed the population decline on the East Coast. Mr. Welton stated the killing of amberjack just for awards over the years turned him against killing these fish and he felt a release only Citation was best for the program. Vote was taken and the amberjack Citation will remain release only by a vote of 9-1.

Mr. Welton suggested a 50 inch release minimum stating 48 inches was proving to be too easy – everyone going on a trip gets a Citation, some anglers just have to “crank” on a few more fish than others. Consensus for a 50 inch release standard.

Red Drum

Mr. Bain stated there could not be a weight Citation since it is illegal to possess a fish over 26 inches. Mr. Hall stated this was a record year and recent trend has been high. Mr. Bain reviewed recent Citation numbers and the distribution of lengths listed on Citation applications the past two years – more than 60% were 46 inches or larger. Mr. Welton asked Craig Paige for his input, and Mr. Paige stated he caught lots of fish 42-44 inches, but a trophy fish might be considered as high as 46 inches. Mr. Bain reviewed his experience with large red drum, including his feeling that measurements were not necessarily accurate by anglers. Consensus was reached based on large number of fish reported at 46 inches or larger in recent years to raise Citation minimum to 46 inches.

Black Drum

Mr. Neill renewed his call for a weight Citation stating these are a food fish. Mr. Hall stated tourists want to keep these fish, they are legal and they are eaten in the DelMarVa

and Pennsylvania areas. Mrs. Snook does not like the killing of such old fish, but does not have a problem since they are a food fish for many Eastern Shore visitors. Mr. Welton stated they are too old and too valuable to catch just once. Mr. Neill suggested an 80 pound minimum for a kill Citation, a vote was taken and a weight Citation at 80 pounds was passed 7-3.

Mr. Hall stated the current length for a release was too small but the length adopted should encourage the release of these big spawning fish. Consensus was reached to raise release length minimum to 46 inches.

Crevalle Jack

Mr. Neill renewed his request for a weight Citation, which received active support from several Committee members. Debate about the possible food value followed. A vote was taken and resulted in a 5-5 tie concerning whether to establish a weight Citation. Mr. Bain broke the tie by voting no. Consensus was reached to keep the release standard at 40 inches.

Tarpon

No impetus for a kill Citation. Mr. Elliott stated the current 30 inch minimum was not a respectable tarpon. Mr. Bain reminded the Committee this was adopted when 3 tarpon of 16 inches were registered several years ago and it was felt those fish were misidentified by the angler (threadfin herring or possibly ladyfish). Mr. Elliott suggested a 48 inch minimum and consensus reached to require a 48 inch estimated length for a tarpon release.

False Albacore

Mr. Neill renewed his request for a weight Citation citing the fish being utilized as bait (shark, flounder and sea bass) and by some for food. He suggested a 17 pound minimum. A vote was taken and by a 7-2 margin (with 1 abstention) false albacore will remain release only. Consensus reached to keep 32 inch minimum length standard for releases.

Mr. Bain stated that several persons had requested the reinstatement of the annual species awards and asked if the Committee wished to revisit this issue. Mr. Hall felt these awards should be considered and the biggest obstacle to them was the constant problem with commercial hook-and-line caught fish being entered. Mr. Elliott agreed, but stated that anglers in his area would like to do away with the master and expert angler program, which seemed to fostered too much competition. Mr. Welton reviewed the entire history of competition and how it has affected the VSWFT, including the cutthroat era with the angler-of-the-year award, the problems with policing commercial hook-and-line caught fish, the move toward awards with unlimited numbers of winners (such as master and expert angler) in order to move away from one person having to "beat" another's catch, and the problem that surfaced with one of the release trophies a couple of years ago. He also stated that tightening Citation standards could dampen this frenzied pursuit of anglers for double digit numbers of Citations in a year – recognizing only true trophy fish will help to calm down the dogged pursuit of "glory". Mr. Welton also supported a return of an annual awards ceremony. Mr. Bain stated that he disagreed with Mr. Wray's comment during the public comment period that problems with 3 annual awards in 2

years was not significant; when dealing with such a small number of awards it is a significant problem on a percentage basis and any program that provides consistent “negative” publicity for the program is a problem. Mr. Neill further explored the commercial hook-and-line caught fish problem and discussion ensued on how and why it was not possible to exclude these fish from program entry. Mr. Welton then stated a few “bad apples” should not be allowed to ruin this program and made a motion to reinstate the annual awards for the biggest fish in each species in 2003 with no award for the most releases since this had more potential for problems. Mr. Beauchamp seconded and it passed 10-0.

Mr. Welton then made a motion to reinstate the annual awards ceremony, Mr. Thurston seconded, and it passed 10-0.

Mr. Neill then made a motion to change tournament rules to retroactively give awards for 2003. Mr. Welton seconded. Discussion ensued concerning the inadvisability of changing rules in the middle of a year (only happened once in Tournament history when striped bass were removed from the program due to the implementation of a moratorium on catch) and the possibility an angler who might have caught a winning fish but released it due to his knowledge of the lack of annual awards might have a complaint. Mr. Welton withdrew his second and the motion failed for lack of a second.

The need to address scale calibration and maintenance was discussed since the length proposal failed. Mr. Welton made a motion to hire a person to provide calibration at least annually, apply for money if needed from MRFAB, and provide a mechanism for taking scales out-of-service that fail calibration via a letter from VSWFT. Second provided by Mr. Neill. Mrs. Snook stated this was a good way to go as long as weigh stations were provided adequate notice when scales needed to be fixed. Mr. Randolph inquired if volunteers could be used, but the consensus was this would not work. Motion passed 10-0.

Mr. Neill brought up the option of getting a release Citation when fishing alone, which was carried over for study from the prior year. Mr. Welton stated a picture on a ruler could be submitted with the application as long as the other entry criteria were met, including having the picture to the weigh station within 7 days of date of catch. Mr. Hall stated it had to be a clear picture showing length of fish. Discussion about fish without a length requirement ensued and most Committee members were not willing to consider a picture of the fish in the water. Mr. Neill made a motion to accept release Citations documented by a photograph of the fish on a flat ruler as long as it is made available within 7 days of date of catch. Mr. Beauchamp supplied a second and the motion carried 10-0.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:50 pm.

VIRGINIA SALTWATER FISHING TOURNAMENT

ELIGIBLE SPECIES AND MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

FOR CITATIONS IN 2004

	<u>Minimum Length</u>	<u>Minimum Weight</u>
Blue or White Marlin	Any	N/A
Sailfish	Any	N/A
Swordfish	Any	N/A
Spearfish	Any	N/A
Shark (any)	72 in.*	N/A
Amberjack	50 in.	N/A
Tarpon	48 in.*	N/A
Red Drum	46 in.	N/A
Crevale Jack	40 in.	N/A
False Albacore	32 in.	N/A
Tuna, Bluefin	60 in.*	100 lbs.
Tuna, Yellowfin or Bigeye	50 in.	70 lbs.
Black Drum	46 in.	80 lbs.
Cobia	50 in.	55 lbs.
Striped Bass (Rockfish)	44 in.	40 lbs.
Wahoo	50 in.*	35 lbs.
Dolphin	46 in.	25 lbs.
King Mackerel	44 in.*	20 lbs.
Bluefish	36 in.	16 lbs.
Gray Trout	30 in.	9 lbs.
Spadefish	22 in.	9 lbs.
Tautog	23 in.	9 lbs.
Flounder	26 in.	7 lbs.
Sheepshead	21 in.	7 lbs.
Speckled Trout	24 in.	5 lbs.
Black Sea Bass	22 in.	5 lbs.
Spanish Mackerel	26 in.	5 lbs.
Gray Triggerfish	20 in.	4 lbs.
Croaker	20 in.	3 lbs.
Pompano	16 in.	1 lb., 8 oz.
Kingfish (Roundhead)	16 in.	1 lb., 8 oz.
Spot	13 in.	1 lb.

Release Citation available for all Species (based on length)

*Estimated Length (All other lengths must be actual measurements)